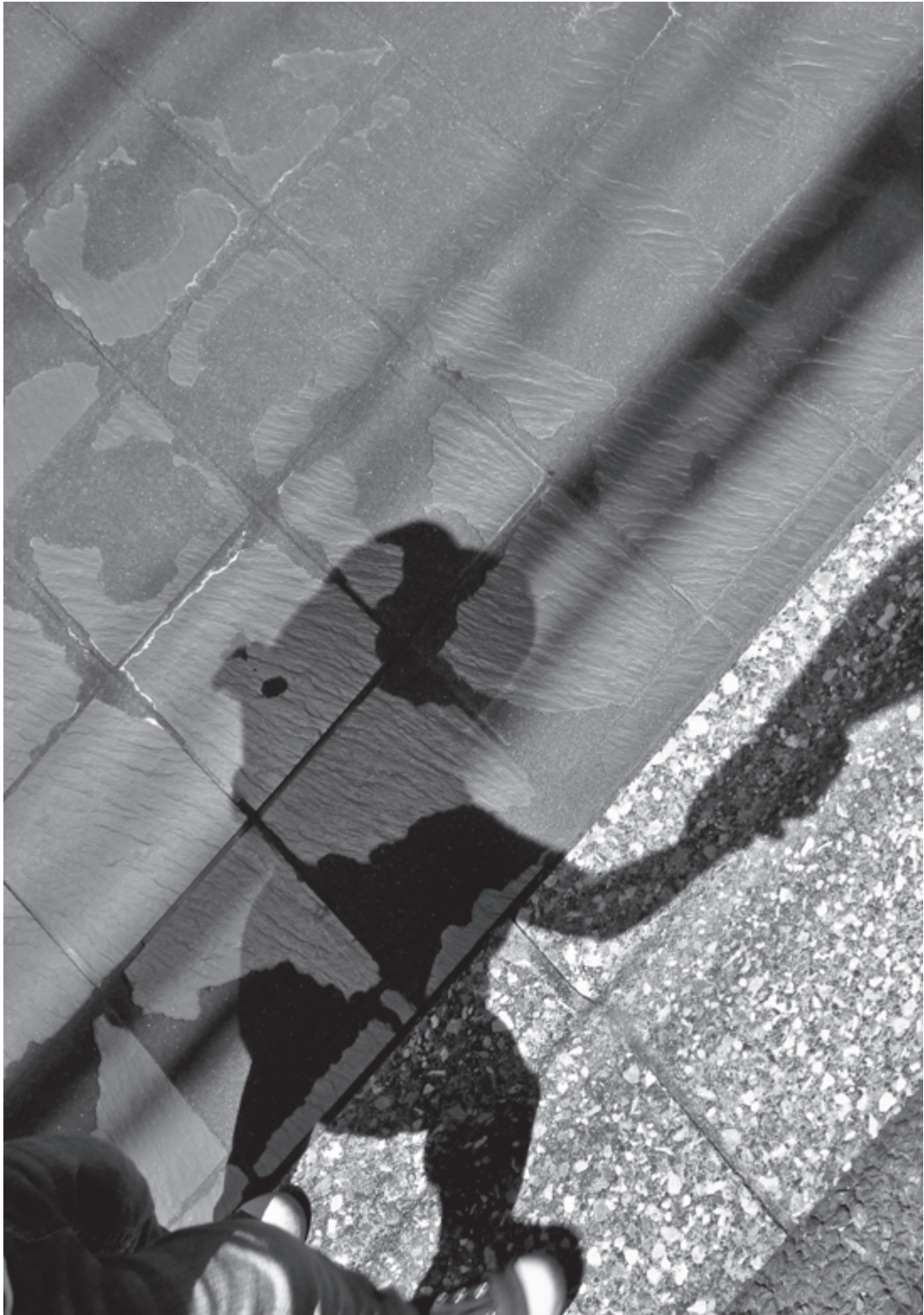


Flatlanders : a visual essay of many (though seemingly two) dimensions

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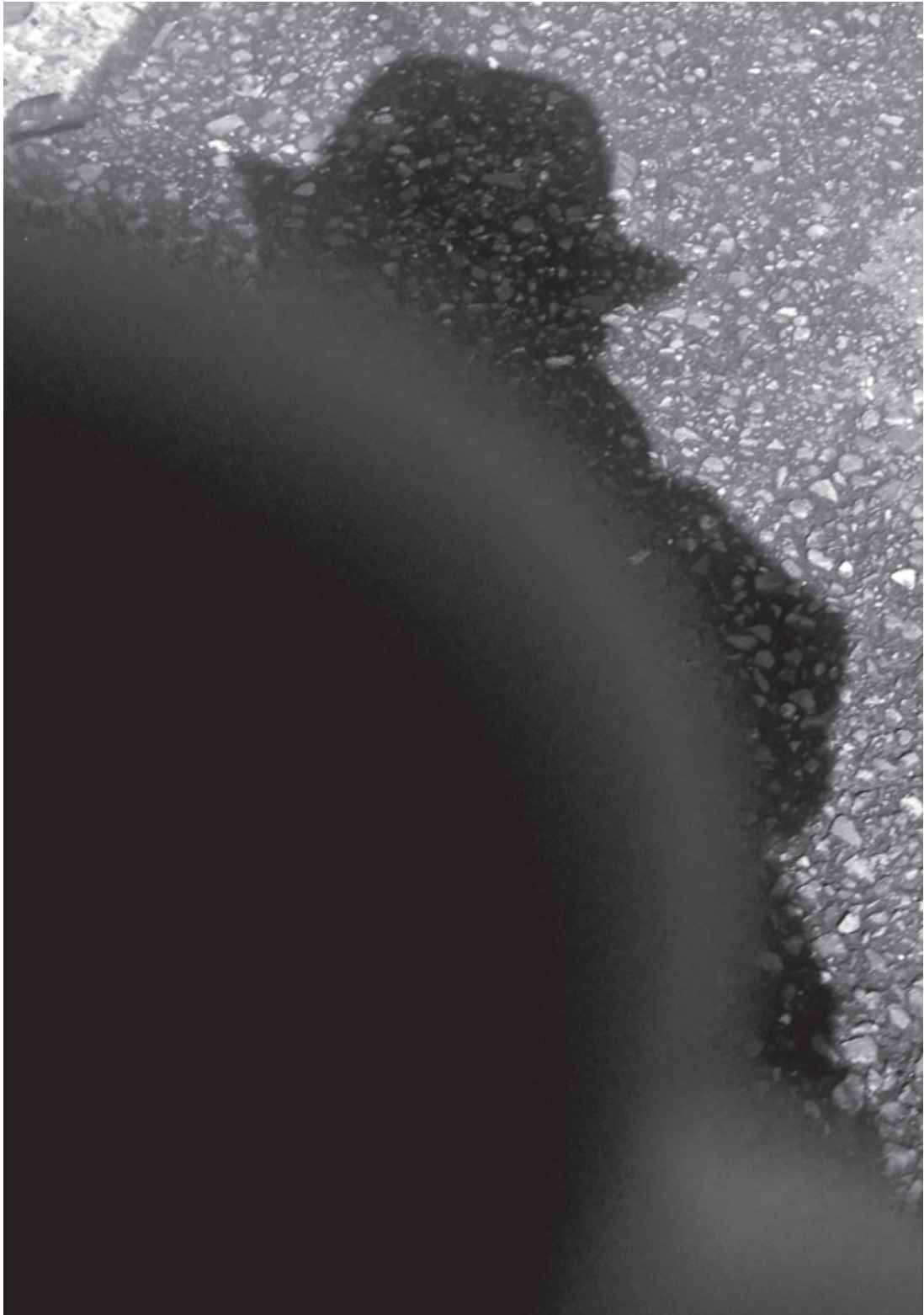






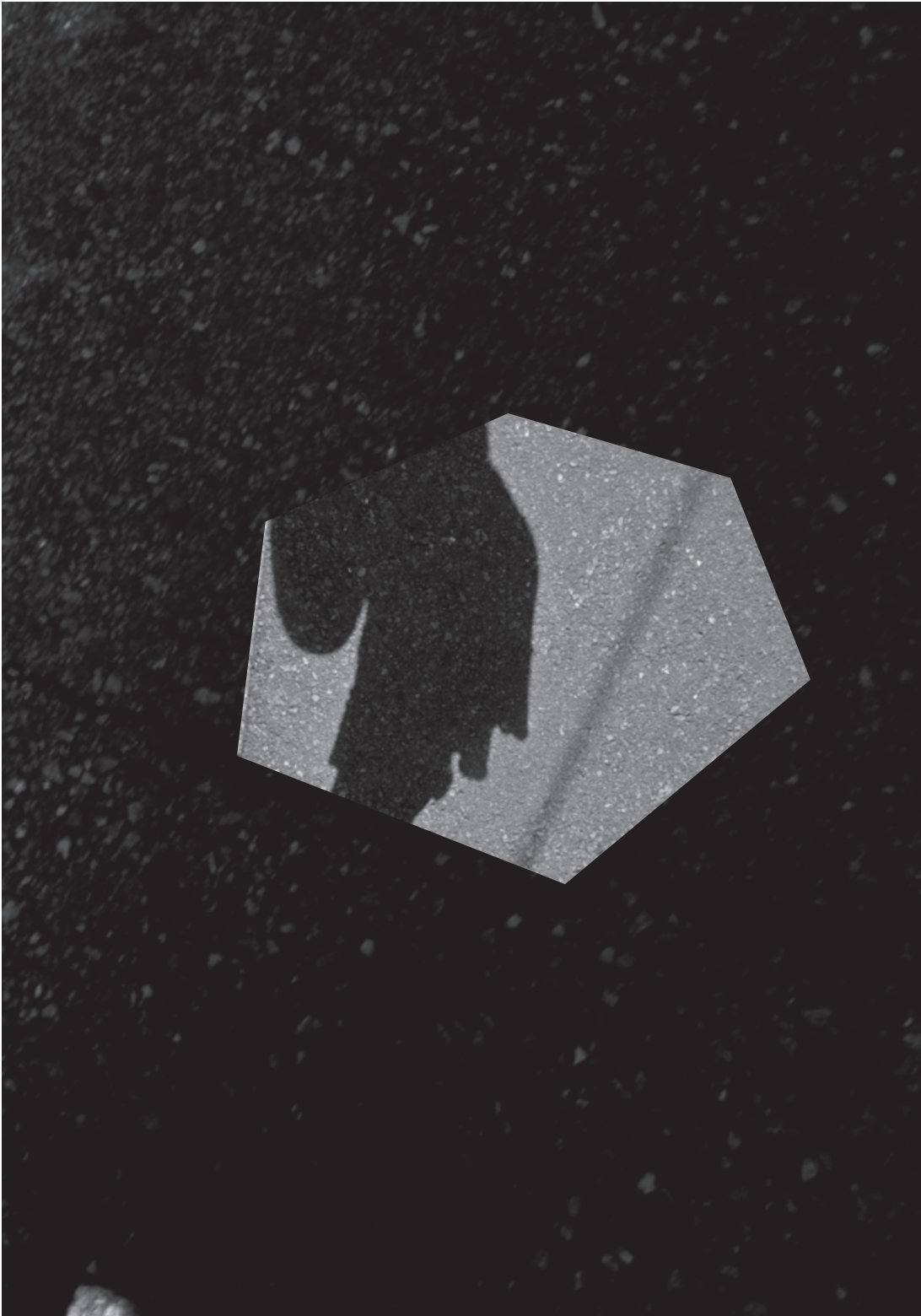
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***Flatlanders: a visual essay of many
(though seemingly two) dimensions***

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Edwin A. Abbott's 1884 novella *Flatland* tells the story of Mr. A. Square, a being of only two dimensions who has an encounter with other dimensions. In his self-introduction, Mr. Square describes how life and society evolve in his world. For instance, most male children in Flatland are born with one more side than their father, which in Flatland society means that each generation can rise one step in society. The evolutionary rules in Flatland are far more complex than space will allow here, but this aspect of evolution was something that resonated with my British—and class sensitive—upbringing. By virtue of being a different generation, children can teach parents much about their current dimensions.

In Spring 2018, when my wife and I learned we would be expecting a second child, I started to take my son (then nearly three-years-old) out for walks around our neighbourhood of Yanaka. This was much more difficult than it seemed. Him being extremely mobile yet not always steady, it was necessary for me to not only be aware of what was immediately around us but also to (somewhat impossibly) see around corners and behind walls. In time I did (thankfully) acquire a sharper sense of anticipating the near future, but it didn't come naturally and would quickly soften without regular practice. His concentration was on looking at still objects, my concentration was on looking out for moving ones. In also carrying a 'high-end' digital pocket camera, I began to notice a parallel between how I was looking at my surroundings and street photography, a genre of photography which requires spatial awareness and timing that takes years of practice to perfect. While only one or two of the pictures I took might be considered successful as street photographs, what was more of interest to me was that certain kinds of photographs were being repeated again and again. There were the 'landmarks', the things he would regularly look at during our outings (e.g. 'Mr. Turtle', 'yellow paint' and 'Blue Joban line'), but there was also our relationship recorded in the form of hands, reflections, shadows and other symbols. On my son's third birthday, my father gave him a second-hand consumer compact digital camera which he occasionally uses during our walks. His photographs include a lot of flowers, cats (and fingers), but occasionally they show us, too.

As we and our relationship changes, these two cameras play out a conversation in and about time. When he is old enough to reflect on our images himself, my hope is that the past will just feel like a different time zone.

This visual essay comprises eleven photographs taken during some of our many walks. Each is notable for the projection of shadows, a motif strongly associated with the history of photography and the desire to fix an image of something or someone beloved (as *memento mori*) before they are lost to the world. Viewed in sequence, these shadows also weave traces of what may be a common parental experience, or indeed any learning experience: that going out into the world and looking can be enlightening and exciting (1 & 2), but can also lead to resistance and frustration with some level of playfulness (3–5), which can then turn into distance and re-discovery (6 & 7), bringing about abstract rules, self-doubt and uncertainty (8 & 9), before realizing that everything is destined to repeat albeit in a Kierkegaardian ‘good’ way (10). The added bonus is that love or knowledge are essentially gifts acquired along the way and it is these that are not easily lost (11). In this way, they contain an underlying message of remembering to live (and learn).

1. Yanaka, October (2018)
2. Yanaka, August (2018)
3. Yanaka, September (2018)
4. Yanaka, October (2018)
5. Marunouchi, August (2018)
6. Yanaka, September (2018)
7. Yanaka, October (2018)
8. Yanaka, October (2018)
9. Yanaka, September (2018) – inset: Yanaka, October (2018)
10. Ueno, December (2018)
11. Nezu, November (2018)